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THE THERAPEUTIC POWER OF DIGITAL READING: ENHANCING MENTAL HEALTH IN PSYCHIATRIC SETTINGS

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Abstract: Bibliotherapy has long been recognized as a therapeutic approach to promoting mental health. With the advent of digital technology, a new form known as 'digital bibliotherapy' has emerged. This innovative approach involves delivering therapeutic content through electronic devices, such as computers, tablets, and smartphones, offering a blend of the therapeutic benefits of bibliotherapy with the convenience and accessibility of digital technology. Digital bibliotherapy integrates interactive elements and multimedia resources, creating a personalized and immersive therapeutic experience. Notably, this approach addresses issues of accessibility and inclusivity by overcoming geographical and temporal limitations and reaching a more diverse audience. It proves particularly advantageous for individuals facing obstacles to traditional therapy, whether due to geographical remoteness, stigma, or financial concerns.

Keywords: digital bibliotherapy, mental health, therapeutic intervention, digital technology, accessibility.

1. Introduction

Bibliotherapy, the use of books as a form of therapeutic intervention, has been recognized as a valuable strategy in promoting mental health for several decades (Shechtman, 2009). However, as the proliferation of digital technology continues, a new form of bibliotherapy, termed 'digital bibliotherapy', has emerged and holds great potential in addressing mental health concerns.

Digital Bibliotherapy is the use of digital books, literature, and other reading materials delivered via electronic devices (e.g., computers, tablets, smartphones), with an aim to provide therapeutic benefits (Bergsland&Strøm, 2020). This approach blends the therapeutic advantages of bibliotherapy with the accessibility and convenience of digital technologies. The digital platform allows for the inclusion of interactive elements and multimedia resources, enabling a more personalized and immersive therapeutic experience (Chamberlain et al., 2008).

Existing research shows that digital bibliotherapy can offer significant improvements in accessibility and inclusivity. It is capable of overcoming geographical and temporal constraints and reaches a wider, more diverse audience. It is particularly beneficial for those who are unable to access traditional forms of therapy or face other barriers to seeking help, such as stigma or financial concerns (Cuijpers et al., 2017).

Bibliotherapy typically involves the application of literature as a therapeutic tool, aiding individuals in dealing with emotional distress, mental health conditions, or life transitions (Pardeck, 1994). It is also utilized as a catalyst for fostering personal growth and eliciting effective change (Lenkowsky, 1987). Specifically, therapeutic reading

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serves as a soothing method for managing various mental health disorders, including anxiety and mood disorders, depressive episodes, phobias, and sleep disturbances, while also enhancing psychological wellness (Dos Reis et al., 2020). Seen as a therapeutic approach employing texts to aid those struggling with mental and physical health issues, bibliotherapy is generally acknowledged for its beneficial outcomes. However, there remains a degree of disagreement concerning the most effective strategies for implementing bibliotherapy in practice (Brewster & McNicol, 2021).

Despite the promising prospects of digital bibliotherapy, rigorous empirical research is needed to establish its effectiveness, define its scope, and address potential drawbacks such as technology barriers and privacy concerns. As the digital revolution continues to transform our lives, it is essential to understand how this innovative form of therapy can be utilized effectively in the realm of mental health.

2. Literature Review

Digital Bibliotherapy, an innovative convergence of bibliotherapy and digital technology, has been the subject of numerous studies, reflecting its increasing importance in the field of mental health care. This literature review aims to assess the current state of research on digital bibliotherapy, particularly focusing on its use among hospitalized psychiatric patients.

Societies continually grapple with the physical and mental well-being of their members. This issue has become more pronounced in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic, with a notable surge in mental health disorders exerting significant economic and social burdens on communities (Khoeini et al., 2019). Today's hospital health science libraries, connected to a global knowledge network through digital infrastructures, bear little resemblance to their predecessors (Wolfgram, 1985). Digital libraries stand at the forefront of this transformation. Offering bibliotherapeutic information in a digital format aligns with contemporary user expectations and needs, thus expanding the reach and effectiveness of such therapeutic interventions.

In contemporary bibliotherapeutic practices, whether clinical or developmental, mental health practitioners might recommend a variety of literary works such as novels, short stories, biographies, plays, fairy tales, fables, and poetry as components of a patient's treatment regimen (McCulliss, 2012). Bruneau and Pehrsson's study underscores the necessity of tailoring reading materials to individual needs and invites bibliotherapists to include clients in the selection process to stimulate self-awareness and reading enthusiasm (Bruneau & Pehrsson, 2017). The burgeoning genre of self-help books, which is gaining widespread popularity, provides another form of bibliotherapy that can be integrated with cognitive behavioral therapy (McCulliss, 2012). Conditions such as depression, anxiety (Popa, 2017), PTSD (Glavin & Montgomery, 2017), panic attacks (Febbraro, 2005), insomnia (Jernelöv et al., 2012), stress (Hazlett-Stevens & Oren, 2017), and the psychological repercussions of strokes (Eum & Yim, 2015) have all been shown to benefit from the use of self-help books.

Recent research from Sweden (2020) and Poland (2017) suggests that bibliotherapy could serve as an effective adjunct to conventional therapy and medical treatments (Bergqvist & Punzi, 2020; Czernianin et al., 2019). Nevertheless, further clinical investigations are needed to equip physicians and psychologists with a research-supported framework for clinical bibliotherapy (Czernianin et al., 2019; Hazlett-Stevens H, Oren).

However, these studies suggest that, despite potential barriers, digital bibliotherapy holds a significant promise for the future of mental health care in hospital settings. With the ongoing digital revolution, there is a strong potential to leverage digital bibliotherapy to enhance traditional therapeutic interventions and provide more personalized, accessible, and effective mental health care.

3. Conclusions

In conclusion, digital bibliotherapy represents an exciting frontier in the realm of psychiatric care for hospitalized patients. Existing research showcases its potential for effectiveness and accessibility, while also highlighting the

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importance of addressing challenges to its implementation. As this field continues to evolve, further research is crucial to fully realize the potential of digital bibliotherapy in mental health care.

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